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Idaho Transportation Department

Today's News Briefs

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T.F. highway commissioner seat up for election in August

TWIN FALLS - One challenger has stepped up to face an incumbent in an Aug. 7 election that will decide who represents the largest of three sub-districts in the Twin Falls Highway District.

The Twin Falls Highway District, which towers over three smaller highway districts in Twin Falls County, recently came under the public spotlight. Employees and former employees accused their bosses of pressuring them to vote for the incumbent in the 2003 election.

Dave Burgess, the district director, flatly denied the allegations and called the problem a personnel issue. A lawsuit filed by a former employee against the agency was settled in January.

The Twin Falls Highway District has a \$6 million budget, and its staff of about 30 workers is responsible for 750 miles of county roads. It acts independent of the Twin Falls County Commission or any other public entity. The only leverage citizens have is the ballot.

The district splits into three sub-districts. The largest of the three, sub-district 3, is the commission seat up for grabs in August. It is the largest sub-district, running south from Main Avenue in Twin Falls to south of Salmon Falls Creek Reservoir. In spite of its vast terrain, the sub-district covers a less densely populated area than the other two.

Herm Osterkamp, a retired farmer who lives near Curry Crossing, has served two four-year terms as commissioner for sub-district 3. Osterkamp said he has an extensive understanding of how to adapt county roads to subdivided farm properties.

His education on subdivisions began when he opened his own subdivision in 1994 on his farm. If residents of a subdivision bring their private road up to county standards, the district will take over maintenance responsibilities.

"Ninety-nine percent or more (subdivisions) want the highway district to take over their roads," Osterkamp said. "I was a farmer. I went into developing. I developed the subdivision itself - all the steps to develop a subdivision. With my experience I think I could give a lot of input."

Another retired farmer, Maurice Fuller, has filed as a challenger for the position.

The other T.F. Highway District commissioners are Art Baily and Ron Pierce.

Opposition to incumbent commissioners is rare in Twin Falls County's other highway districts, in Buhl, Murtaugh and Filer.

Today is the filing deadline for candidates in the Twin Falls, Buhl and Filer highway districts. Opposing candidacies had not been filed in either of the other two districts as of Thursday. Murtaugh Highway District could not be contacted by late afternoon Thursday.